

RAISING AWARENESS OF AUTISM FOR YOUNG ADULTS THROUGH EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATION

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ABSTRAK

Many with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) struggle to achieve independence due to a lack of understanding and acceptance, particularly among young adults. To bridge this gap, this project proposes an experimental animation designed to foster empathy. Through a combination of literature review, interviews with psychologists and ASD companions, and participatory observations at an autism center, the project will gain insights into the lived experiences of ASD and the challenges young adults pose to social inclusion. The animation itself will leverage the flexibility of experimental animation to portray the frustrations and difficulties encountered by people with ASD due to social exclusion. Ultimately, the project aims to create a bridge of understanding through emotional connection, fostering empathy and acceptance among young adults towards individuals on the autism spectrum.

kata kunci: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Experimental Animation, Independence, Inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

Independence is one of the crucial aspects in the lives of people with disabilities (Monin et al., 2014). However, independence does not solely mean individuals with disabilities living alone; rather, it entails them being able to engage in activities and lead their lives according to their own wishes without depending on others (Ratzka, 2007). In other words, they can become members of society who have the freedom to access public facilities, entertainment venues, education, and even hold jobs (Bostad & Hanisch, 2016).

However, in reality, many individuals with disabilities still struggle to

achieve independent lives, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This was affirmed through interviews with Professor Endang Rochyadi, M.Pd., a prominent figure in Special Education at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). As an academic and practitioner actively involved in the disability community, Professor Endang still observes many individuals with ASD who are dependent and lack independence. He adds that many individuals with ASD, after completing their education, do not work or engage in activities outside their homes. There are numerous factors hindering individuals with disabilities from leading

independent lives. Professor Endang states that one of the biggest challenges lies within the ASD community itself. Indonesia still lacks inclusivity towards individuals with ASD. The main factor is the lack of awareness among young adults aged 18-25 about the existence of individuals with ASD. They perceive the behavior of individuals with ASD as elusive. The lack of appreciation, encouragement, and misinterpretation towards individuals with ASD can make them lack confidence and be unwilling to lead independent lives. To achieve independence, an inclusive environment and young adults aged 18-25 who are aware of the existence of individuals with ASD are needed. This awareness can be fostered through empathy and sympathy built by young adults towards individuals with ASD. This emotional approach is achieved through narratives and stories from the perspective of individuals with ASD. Individuals with ASD have their own life stories. By sharing them, their stories can serve as a basis for raising awareness among young adults aged 18-25 about individuals with ASD.

To respond to the abstract and imaginative nature of stories and emotions, the author designs experimental animation as a creative

medium to increase awareness among young adults aged 18-25. To respond to the inspirational stories of people with disabilities, a process is required with methods within the experimental animation that can adapt to individuals with ASD. Graphics and narratives cannot always be confined to a single system. Dynamic and exploratory methods and processes in experimental animation can adapt to the thinking and creative processes of individuals with ASD.

On the other hand, according to Kim Knowles and Jonathan Walley (2018), experimental animation offers a new experience to young adults aged 18-25. Experimental animation is characterized by its exploratory and pioneering nature. While mainstream animation typically has static and structured narratives and graphics, experimental animation has the potential to push and expand existing animation processes into something new (Knowles & Walley, 2018).

Through this design of experimental animation, the author hopes that young adults aged 18-25 will increase their awareness of the existence of individuals with ASD.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How to raise awareness of people with ASD to young adults aged 18-25 years?
2. How to design an experimental animation about people with ASD for young adults aged 18-25 years?

METHOD

The method used is qualitative method with the following stages:

1. Data collection begins with literature review. Reviewing theories to previous research through books, journals, and articles related to ASD and the issues surrounding them. This stage is the author's foundation for the next stage, which is data collection through interviews.
2. The interview stage begins with interviewing academics who research ASD, then continues with practitioners such as therapists and psychologists who have been close to and interacted intensively with individuals with ASD. At this stage, the author delves deeper into the issues and receives advice on the design outcomes. The author also

seeks advice on approaches to interviewing individuals with ASD.

3. After interviewing about the approach and problem topics, the researcher proceeds to the stage of participatory observation with individuals with ASD level 1-2.
4. The collected data will be the basis for the design work. Phenomena and characteristics possessed by individuals with ASD will be visualized into experimental animations. This animation will not have a narrative, but will present context within the characteristics of individuals with ASD implicitly. Providing experiences and inviting viewers to feel what has been difficult for them to understand.

RESULTS

The author adopts a narrative approach in crafting this experimental animation, aiming to facilitate the target audience's comprehension of the intended message. Responding to the experiences, characteristics, and creative cognitive processes of individuals with ASD, the author endeavors to evoke emotional resonance with the target audience.

Experiences are underscored as the primary narrative catalyst, intended to provide the target audience with a firsthand perspective of individuals with ASD. This serves as the initial step in fostering emotional connections between the audience and those with ASD. The identified experiences of the target audience, as summarized from previous chapters, include misinterpretation, communication challenges, unmet desires leading to outbursts, parental adaptation in communication, struggles with abstract concepts, the delicate balance between tenderness and firmness in parental relationships, the perceived invisibility of individuals with ASD in public spaces, and the strong bond typically shared between mothers and individuals with ASD.

Characteristics are portrayed as underlying elements and nuances that assist the audience in identifying with the narrative surrounding individuals with ASD. These characteristics encompass repetitive behaviors, tendencies toward obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), patterned behaviors, aversion to eye contact and conversation, discomfort with unfamiliar stimuli, and a preference for spinning objects. Drawing from the insights gleaned in previous chapters, the portrayal of individuals with ASD's lives is

depicted as not solely fraught with difficulty and sorrow. Instead, they perceive the world through a unique and divergent lens, a perspective seldom illuminated for the target audience.

The outcome of this endeavor is an experimental animation titled "Through Their Eyes," which symbolizes the narrative's exploration of the experiences of individuals with ASD from their own viewpoint. In essence, the narrative depicted offers insight into the daily trials and triumphs encountered by individuals with ASD. In summary, while individuals with ASD encounter distinct challenges, their lives are rich with creativity, love, and unique perspectives. It is incumbent upon society, represented by the target audience, to cultivate understanding and empathy, thereby enabling individuals with ASD to navigate their lives with greater ease and acceptance.



Figure 2 Mood Board for Dalam Pandang
(Source: Personal research documentation)

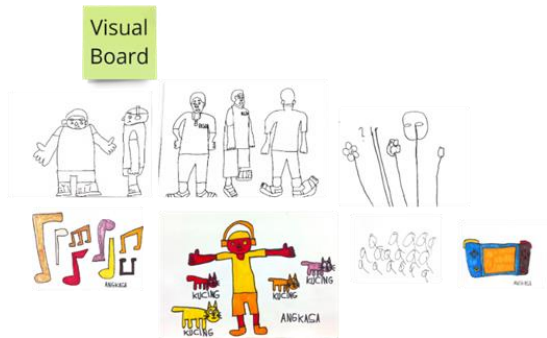


Figure 3 Visual Board for Dalam Pandang
(Source: Personal research documentation)

The author responds to and manipulates space imagery as the visual concept for this animation design. However, there are several adjustments in the visuals to facilitate the target audience's comprehension of the narrative and to streamline the author's process in transforming it into animation. The primary focus in developing visuals for this experimental animation is to capture the essence of the imagery of individuals with ASD that the author has analyzed.

Characters

The author concludes that there are three main elements in the life of an individual with ASD: the individual with ASD, the caregiver, and the instincts possessed by individuals with ASD. These three elements need to be responded to and designed into characters as the driving force of the narrative in this animation.

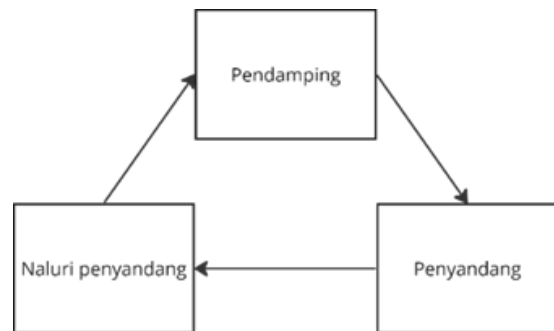


Figure 4: Character Elements for Dalam Pandang
(Source: Personal research documentation)

a) Character with ASD

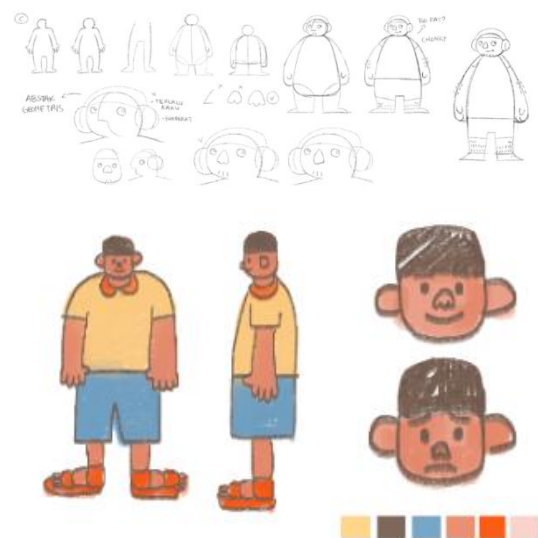


Figure 5 Boy Character for Dalam Pandang
(Source: Personal research documentation)

The character of the individual with ASD is visualized as a typical human being. The characteristics of individuals with ASD will be depicted through gestures and sounds in the animation.

b) Cat - Instinct of the Individual with ASD



Figure 6 Cat Character for Dalam Pandang
(Source: Personal research documentation)

The instinct of the individual with ASD is visualized as a cat. Cats are known to be friendly and highly social with humans, as well as having a high level of curiosity (Cambridge University Press, 2017), but they also possess aggressive and cunning traits. They can be manipulative to fulfill their own desires and are often provocative (Journal of Ethology, 2009).

c) Bird – Caregiver



Figure 7: Bird Character for Dalam Pandang
(Source: Personal research documentation)

The caregiver is represented as a crow. Crows are birds known for their intelligence but are often misunderstood due to their frightening appearance, similar to how caregivers are sometimes perceived as villains from the perspective of individuals with ASD.

World Building

There are two worlds in this narrative: the world of individuals with ASD and the real world. To differentiate between them, the author presents differences in media in the design and responds to their characteristics.

1. Real World

The real world is visualized with bright and warm colors located in the home. This reflects the warmth created by the caregivers within the home for individuals with ASD.

2. The World of Individuals with ASD

The world of individuals with ASD is more complex to visualize. The author designs this world by responding to the emotional intelligence, thoughts, and familiar things with individuals with ASD. The world and visuals chosen by the author are organic forms with universal knowledge, making them easily recognizable and avoiding unfamiliar objects for individuals with ASD.

The author introduces a wider range of colors and attractive elements in the world of individuals with ASD to showcase their creativity and uniqueness.

Stage 1 represents the discomfort of individuals with ASD, characterized by resembling a forest. Stage 1 is filled with crowds and spontaneity, which generally make individuals with ASD uncomfortable. This discomfort is the initial step for individuals with ASD to escape and immerse themselves into their own world.



Figure 8 Stage 1

(Source: Personal research documentation)

Stage 2 represents the things that individuals with ASD enjoy, characterized by resembling the sea. The sea embodies tranquility, coolness, and things that make individuals with ASD feel comfortable and familiar.

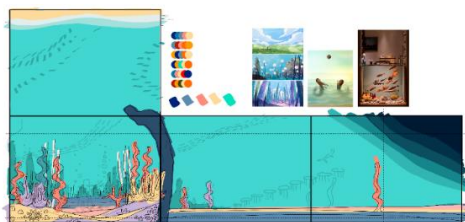


Figure 9 Stage 2

(Source: Personal research documentation)

Stage 3 represents the obsessions of individuals with ASD, characterized by resembling space with rotating circular elements. This stage is filled with silence, tranquility, and everything that individuals with ASD enjoy, making them continue to walk and enter their minds, unwilling to return to the real world.



Figure 10 Stage 3

(Source: Personal research documentation)

Stage 4 represents loss and emptiness. The individuals with ASD have already lost themselves in their minds and find it difficult to understand what exists within them. This stage is filled with abstract geometric shapes that have no meaning and cannot be understood by individuals with ASD.

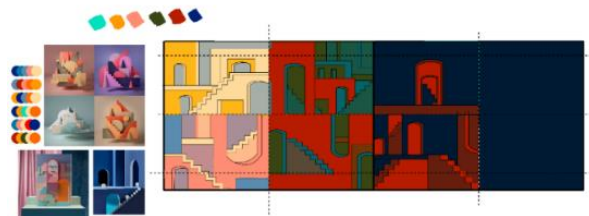


Figure 11 Stage 4

(Source: Personal research documentation)

Technically, the writer conducted experiments to create a world that contrasts with the real world. The writer delved into the appropriate media to visualize the world of individuals with ASD and chose according to the artistic approach that the writer deemed most interesting.

The use of Adobe Illustrator digital effects, 3D Blender, and paper craft cut-out.

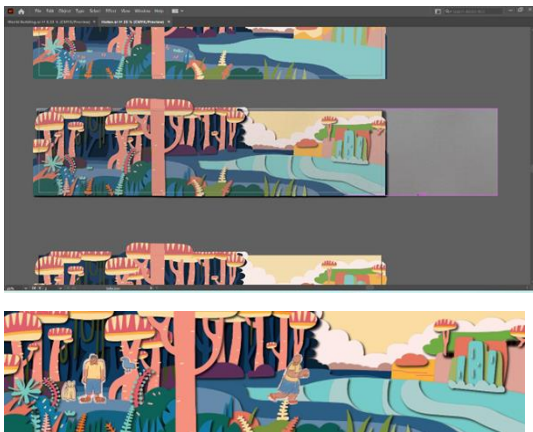


Figure 12 Exploration media using Adobe Illustrator
(Source: Personal research documentation)

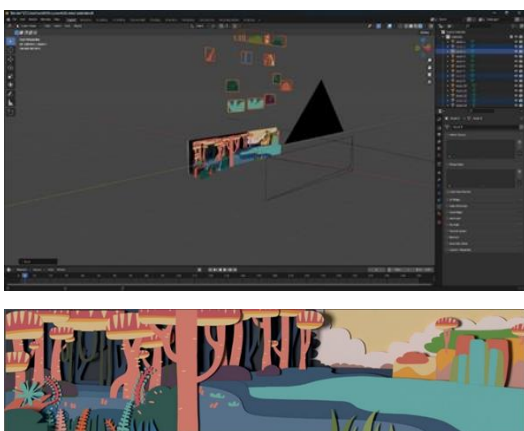


Figure 13 Exploration media using Blender
(Source: Personal research documentation)



Figure 14 Exploration media paper cut-out
(Source: Personal research documentation)

Final Animation

Here are some screenshots of the final animation.



Figure 15: Opening sequences
(Source: Personal research documentation)



Figure 16: Screenshot 1
(Source: Personal research documentation)



Figure 17 Screenshot 2

(Source: Personal research documentation)



Figure 18 Screenshot 3

(Source: Personal research documentation)



Figure 19 Screenshot 4

(Source: Personal research documentation)

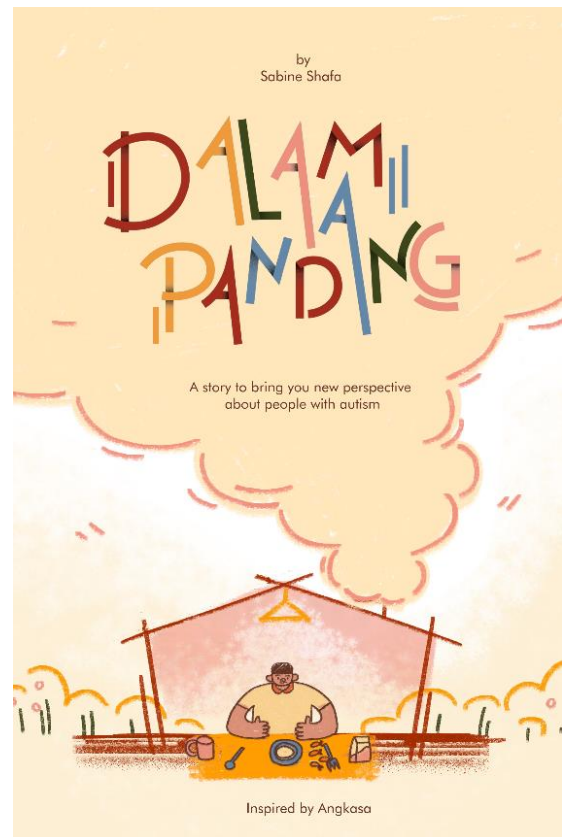


Figure 20 Final Poster

(Source: Personal research documentation)

DISCUSSION

Experimental animation is designed to provide a new experience to the target audience. This experimental animation is created with a narrative approach about the experiences of individuals with ASD in their daily lives. In its narrative, the author emphasizes emotional engagement and builds empathy with the target audience. These emotions are built through the embedding of subtext in characters and the world to convey deeper messages for the target audience to understand. The

novelty aspect addressed in this design is the combination of digital media and handcrafted cutouts.

On Wednesday, June 7, 2024, the author conducted a user test with 30 target participants who met the design target qualifications. The user test was conducted with two screenings of the animation followed by an interview. The following are the results of the interview summarized by the author:

1. Users found the use of mixed media in the animation to be very interesting.
2. Users were able to identify and understand the characteristics of individuals with ASD in the animation characters.
3. Users were able to grasp the positive message of being aware of the presence of individuals with ASD and empathizing with them. In addition, there was an awareness of the different and unique perspectives and thought processes of individuals with ASD, which was even considered fun.
4. Users were enthusiastic about analyzing and trying to understand the narrative and the representation of each character.

Based on the user test results presented by the author, the design is

considered successful and able to fulfill the design goal of increasing awareness among young adults aged 18-25 about individuals with ASD.

1. Mixed Media Appeal

Users appreciated the combination of digital media and handcrafted cutouts, finding it visually engaging and unique.

2. Character Identification:

Users successfully recognized the characteristics of individuals with ASD portrayed in the animation characters, enhancing their understanding of the condition.

3. Positive Message Reception:

Users grasped the message of empathy and awareness towards individuals with ASD, fostering a more inclusive and understanding attitude.

Perspective and Thought Process Insights:

Users gained insights into the unique perspectives and thought processes of individuals with ASD, promoting empathy and understanding.

4. Narrative Engagement

Users were actively engaged in analyzing the narrative and understanding the characters' representations, demonstrating their interest and connection to the story.

Overall, the user test results indicate that the experimental animation

effectively achieved its goal of raising awareness and promoting empathy towards individuals with ASD among the target audience of young adults aged 18-25.

But further narrative and medium exploration are needed. Based on the feedback received during the presentation, the writer has received suggestions and input regarding both the writing and the design aspects. These include expanding and diversifying the portrayal of ASD to be more comprehensive, recognizing that not all characteristics of individuals with ASD can be represented by the design subject. Furthermore, it was advised to use darker colors resembling a crow rather than light blue for the crow character, to maintain its visual association with the crow. Additionally, there was a recommendation to explore the character of the cat, which could potentially become an alter ego of the individual with ASD, and to make it more expressive and playful. It was suggested to incorporate a narrative in the end credits explaining about ASD characters and the inspiring characters in the story, and to include the space-related images that the writer responded to in the end credits. Finally, creating an activation that allows for dialogue between the audience and the

writer was proposed, which would help the audience understand the message more effectively.

CONCLUSION

Independence is an important aspect of the lives of individuals with ASD. To achieve it, an inclusive space is needed to support individuals with ASD in their daily lives. However, based on interview results, many young adults aged 18-25 are still unaware of the existence of individuals with ASD. Therefore, a creative solution is needed to raise awareness of the presence of individuals with ASD among young adults aged 18-25. This project give new solution to raise awareness of people with autism to young adults.

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